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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BASRAH 000051

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [IZ](#)
SUBJECT: SHEIKHS WARN MALIKI TO STEER CLEAR OF ISCI

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CLASSIFIED BY: John Naland, Leader, PRT Basra, Dept of State.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

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Summary
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11. (C) Several well connected sources briefed us on recent conversations with Prime Minister Maliki concerning his coalition building efforts. They have counseled Maliki to avoid alliances with ISCI, suspecting that it is behind the recent increase in violence in Iraq. They have urged the Prime Minister to build a broader coalition to promote reconciliation and create a legacy as a nationalist. One contact detailed several of Maliki's political maneuvers to undercut ISCI and stop it from "creating more chaos." Our contacts' conversations with the Prime Minister reflect both their belief that ISCI is threatening to reverse hard-won security gains and a growing desire among some Basrawis for national unity. End summary.

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Guilty or Innocent, ISCI A Liability
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12. (C) Shia Sheikh Sabah al-Maliki heads the local Beni Malek tribe. It is the same one to which the Prime Minister's family belongs, and though not related to him, Sheikh Sabah holds regular conversations with the Prime Minister. Sheikh Sabah told us that the average Iraqi believes that ISCI was responsible for the August 19 bombings in Baghdad. Sheikh Sabah believes it too, and so informed Maliki. Other contacts, including Colonel Hazam, the head of the Iraqi Intelligence Service's Fusion Center for the Basra region (reftel), and Issam al-Diwan, the Deputy Minister of Youth and Sport (protect), suspect that members of ISCI's former militia, the Badr Corps, are behind much of the recent violence. They see it as pressure from ISCI to get Maliki to join the Iraqi National Alliance (INA).

13. (C) Sheikh Mansour Kan'an al-Tamiemi, an influential Shia leader, also told us that he warned Maliki of the dangers of aligning with ISCI, but for different reasons. He told Maliki that he would lose significant Sunni support if he did. Mansour urged Maliki to look at this election as an opportunity to build a legacy as a nationalist seeking to unite Iraq. Remaining outside the primarily Shia INA and building a broader coalition would help ensure such a legacy, he counseled.

14. (C) Sheikh Sabah also related the same message to Maliki, but in more personal terms. He reportedly told the Prime Minister that a decision to join the INA would force him to vote for Allawi, and that he would urge his supporters to do likewise. Sheikh Sabah told us that Maliki understands his ISCI problem and that it is one of the reasons he is holding to his decision not to join the INA. According to our contacts, it also

accounts for Maliki's renewed efforts to build support among Iraq's Sunni population. Sheikh Sabah said that Maliki currently enjoys strong Sunni support in Mosul and Kirkuk, and in the western provinces of Anbar and Salah al-Din, where he is resurrecting his strategy of making alliances through the Sons of Iraq.

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Political Maneuvers: Moving or Removing People
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¶5. (C) Sheikh Sabah shared with us some of the political moves he says Prime Minister has made in recent weeks to advance his political aims. Sabah said Maliki recently removed 600 ISCI-affiliated teachers in schools throughout Iraq, ostensibly for working with fraudulent credentials. But Maliki's real motive, according to Sabah, was to replace these teachers, who are responsible for running the polling stations in their schools during elections, with people he trusts.

¶6. (C) Another of Maliki's maneuvers, Sabah said, was aimed at trying to prevent ISCI and the Badr Corps from "creating more chaos." One tactic Maliki used several weeks ago was to sideline a number of Badr Corps officials serving in the Iraqi security forces. According to Sabah, the Prime Minister ordered these officials to be assigned to special training in Baghdad as a way of detaining them until after the national elections.

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Comment
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¶7. (C) These contacts have different backgrounds and perspectives. But they are all Shia and all share a belief that ISCI is threatening to reverse Iraq's hard-won security gains of the last year. Their counsel to Maliki to stay out of the INA reflects not only a wish to weaken ISCI, but also a growing desire among Basrawis for national unity. For these contacts, there is no doubt that Maliki's prospects for reelection improve

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-- and his chances for governing more effectively increase -- if he stakes out an independent position from the INA and builds a broad national coalition.
NALAND